H 33/2

Consumer Product SAFETY ALERT
FROM THE U.S. CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION, WASHINGTON, D.C. 20207

February 1989

CPSC Warns About Hazards of "Do-It-Yourself" Removal of Lead-Based Paint

There is no completely safe method for "do-it-yourself" removal of lead-based paint, according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. Each of the paint-removal methods - sandpaper, scrapers, chemicals, and torches or heat guns - can produce lead fumes or dust. Fumes or dust can become airborne and be inhaled. Further, dust can settle on floors, walls, and tables, and can cause problems. It can be ingested by children from hand-to-mouth contact. It can re-enter the air through cleaning (such as sweeping or vacuuming) or by movements of people throughout the house. Lead-based paint should be removed only by professionals, trained in hazardous material removal, who follow detailed procedures to control and contain lead dust.

Lead-based paint may be found on any interior or exterior surface in an older home, particularly on woodwork, doors, and windows. Heavily-leaded paint was used in about two-thirds of homes built before 1940, one-half of homes built from 1940 to 1960, and some homes built after 1960. In 1978, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission lowered the legal lead content in most paint to 0.06% (a trace amount).

Lead-based paint is a major source of lead poisoning for children and can also affect adults. Lead poisoning can cause brain damage and can result in impaired mental functions. Lead poisoning in children can result in retarded mental and physical development and reduced attention span. In adults, lead poisoning can cause irritability, poor muscle coordination, nerve damage to the sense organs and nerves controlling the body, and may cause problems with reproduction (such as decreased sperm counts). Lead poisoning may also increase the blood pressure in adults. Retarded fetal development can occur at even low blood lead levels. Thus, unborn children, infants, young children, and adults with high blood pressure have been identified as being most vulnerable to the effects of lead.

Consumers themselves cannot tell whether their paint contains lead. Before removing old paint, have the paint checked for lead content. Some local or state health or housing departments can suggest which private labs or public agencies can test your paint for lead or how to obtain a sample for testing. If testing is unavailable or costly, consumers should assume that older painted surfaces contain lead.

Lead-based paint should be removed only by professionals trained in hazardous material removal. Consumers should not attempt to remove lead-based paint. Any attempt to remove lead-based paint may create a serious hazard in the house. A trained professional must follow very detailed procedures to minimize, control and contain lead dust generated by the removal process. These procedures are included in the forthcoming Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Interim Guidelines for Removal of Lead-Based Paint. Homeowners should obtain the HUD interim guidelines (when available in mid-1989) and assure that contractors use them. Homeowners should question contractors about their familiarity with the following procedures:

- The room should be sealed from the rest of the house. All furniture, carpets and drapes should be removed.
- Workers should wear respirators designed to avoid inhaling lead.
- No eating or drinking should be allowed in the work area. All food and eating utensils should be removed from the room. All cabinets as well as food contact surfaces should be covered and sealed.
- Children and other occupants (especially infants, pregnant women, and adults with high blood pressure) should be kept out of the house until the job is completed.
- Clothing worn in the room should be disposed of after working. The work clothing should not be worn in other areas of the house.
- Debris should be cleaned up using special vacuum cleaners with HEPA (high efficiency particle absorption) filters. A wet mop should be used after vacuuming.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is evaluating methods for removal of lead-based paint. By September, 1990, Congress has asked HUD to develop a plan for inspecting and removing lead-based paint from private homes. HUD has contracted with the National Institute of Building Sciences to develop the interim guidelines for removal of lead-based paint. Once completed, the guidelines will go through the HUD internal clearance process and should be available in mid-1989.

Y 3.C 76/3:11-3

READEX FICHE best copy available